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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 000369

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/W, NEA, NEA/ARPI, INR/B

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SUBJECT: OMANI INFLUENCES GNASSINGBE ON TOGO DEMOCRACY

Classified By: Ambassador Richard L. Baltimore III.

Reason: 1.4 (b, d).

1. (C) Salim bin Nasser al-Ismaili (protect), appointed by the Sultan in 1996 to head the Omani Center for Investment Promotion and Export Development (OCIPED), revealed to the Ambassador in a March 1 meeting his personal intercession with self-proclaimed Togolese leader Faure Gnassingbe to end his unconstitutional power grab and compete in presidential elections legally. Ismaili, who has been a close contact of the Embassy for many years, spoke of his personal relationship with former dictator Eyadema and son Faure built over years of making regular business trips to Togo (NFI). Alarmed by the mounting political crisis into which Togo was plunged following Faure's illegal seizure of power hours after his father's February 5 death, Ismaili consulted with Faure directly.

2. (C) With blunt candor, Ismaili told Faure that it was a stupid move to take power unconstitutionally when he would be virtually assured of victory in early elections anyway. In view of the growing international and domestic opposition, Ismaili counseled Gnassingbe to restore the constitutional order voluntarily rather than await his inevitable removal under foreign pressure. Ismaili told the Ambassador that Gnassingbe listened attentively to his counsel, then promptly reached a deal on stepping down as speaker of parliament and simultaneously announcing his candidacy for president.

3. (C) Comment: Recognizing his voice was but one in a chorus of international calls to step down, Ismaili thinks his long-term personal relationship with Gnassingbe gave his counsel some added weight. Ismaili is known to take on special projects for the Sultan; his communications with Faure probably had His Majesty's approval. End comment.
BALTIMORE